

Graffiti Prevention: Tips for Businesses

How does graffiti “hurt”?

Graffiti contributes to reduced retail sales, a decline in property values, and citizen fear. A business littered with graffiti is less likely to be patronized. Citizens feel less safe and secure entering a storefront where graffiti is present.

How can a business prevent graffiti?

1. Ongoing upkeep

Make every effort to keep the appearance of a facility clean and neat.¹ According to the Los Angeles Police Department, an exterior appearance that suggests apathy and neglect attracts vandals. Littered parking lots, graffiti, broken fences, overgrown landscaping, and poor lighting all send a message to vandals that business owners are not attentive or do not care about the business.²

2. Rapid removal

Rapid and continual removal of graffiti is the best way for businesses and commercial property owners to protect the image of their street and preserve customers' sense of security. Studies show that removal within 24 to 48 hours results in a nearly zero rate of reoccurrence.³

3. Control access

- Incorporate shrubs, thorny plants, and vines to restrict vandal access.
- Add or improve lighting around the building to promote natural surveillance.
- Use fences, controlled entrance and exits, rails, and other barriers that discourage through traffic.
- Limit access to roofs by moving dumpsters away from walls and covering drainpipes to prevent vandals from scaling them.

4. Step up security

- Install some type of security camera.
- Organize a “Business Watch” with nearby merchants to keep tabs on a business area. Businesses may want to employ security personnel to monitor property.
- Don't allow a “legal wall”, or an area that permits graffiti, at your business; they are largely ineffective and may draw more graffiti vandals to the area.
- Employ graffiti resistant materials or coatings on a chronically hit wall.

5. Work with the community

- Mount a community mural on a chronically hit wall.
- Print graffiti prevention messages on bags, sales flyers, tray liners, book covers, calendars, and other promotional items.
- Work with other merchants to organize and contribute to a “paint bank.” Paints, rollers, brushes, and other equipment from the bank are “borrowed” as needed. Ensure safe and environmentally appropriate storage of paint. Consider a fire station to house the paint bank.
- Refrain from using graffiti images in ads or promoting graffiti in any way.

¹ Cornelius Ashton and Jordan Mirakian, “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: The Linda Vista Continuing Education Center,” *Campus Law Enforcement Journal* Volume: 31 Issue: 4 July/August 2001, pp. 19, 21-22.

² Los Angeles Police Department, “Los Angeles Police Department Commercial Burglary Prevention Circular,” 2001.

³ Jay Beswick and Ernie Garrett, *Graffiti Prevention Systems*, data from over 1,500 sites in Los Angeles County from 1990-1991.

How might a “graffiti ordinance” affect a business?

Local graffiti ordinances vary, but usually dictate how quickly graffiti must be removed and who is responsible for removal.

In most cases, private businesses are responsible for removing graffiti on their property. In some communities, the city will remove the graffiti, but charge the business owner a fee. Other cities clean up graffiti on private property at no charge to the owner.

Also, graffiti removal by someone other than the business owner usually requires permission from the owner/agent. Find out how graffiti removal on private property is handled in your community. Get a copy of any local graffiti ordinance.

What should a business do if it’s hit with graffiti?

1. **Report.** Contact the police to report graffiti vandalism using a non-emergency number. Some cities have an 800 number for reporting graffiti. Make sure police complete an incident report, a common requirement of insurance companies.
2. **Identify.** Work with local authorities to identify if the graffiti is being done by taggers or gangs. Check with law enforcement about safety concerns when removing gang graffiti.
3. **Document.** Take a picture of the graffiti before it is removed. Photographs will assist law enforcement in their investigation.
4. **Remove.** Remove graffiti promptly and completely.

How should graffiti be removed?

To select the appropriate method for graffiti removal, consider the surface, access, costs, and any local restrictions. Municipal governments often have removal and restoration guidelines for graffiti cleanup. Removal methods may include:

- **Paint out** – on painted surfaces, painting over graffiti is a low-cost removal method. Be sure to color match the paint to the surface. A patchwork of paint or a large block of different color paint is an ideal canvas and will invite more graffiti.
- **Chemical removal** – this method employs some type of solvent to remove graffiti.
- **Power washing** – this removes graffiti by applying water, usually hot, under pressure. Power washing may also be used after applying a paint solvent to the graffiti area. An abrasive, such as baking soda or fine sand, may also be added to the water to remove a thin layer of the surface, and with it, the graffiti.

Consider pooling resources with other merchants and together contract with a company that specializes in graffiti removal. This will encourage quick and appropriate removal.

Resources

- For community-based graffiti prevention resources, tap in to *Graffiti Hurts* at www.graffitihurts.org, or find a local Keep America Beautiful affiliate at www.kab.org.
- To prevent theft and illegal purchase of graffiti tools through responsible retailing, visit the National Council to Prevent Delinquency at www.antigrffiti.org.



Produced by *Graffiti Hurts* and Keep America Beautiful, Inc., 2003.
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